

SPIRITUAL RELIGION.



PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
AND SOLD AT THEIR DEPOSITORY, NO. 144 NASSAU-STREET, NEAR
THE CITY-HALL, NEW-YORK; AND BY AGENTS OF THE
SOCIETY, ITS BRANCHES, AND AUXILIARIES, IN
THE PRINCIPAL CITIES AND TOWNS
IN THE UNITED STATES.

little Pine will be remembered in Heaven."

The author of the "*Memoirs of Samuel J. Mills*," has told us of a consecrated retirement, where, "by the side of a stack of hay," he with two or three of his fellow students, then young in College, devoted a day to prayer and fasting, and familiar conversation on the "new and interesting theme" of Foreign Missions. "This endeared retreat was often made solemn by the presence and hallowed by the piety of these dear young men;" and it is not too much to say, that the sympathies of the Christian world have been moved by the story of that retired spot, where Mills and his companions presented to God "those early and fervent supplications, to which may be traced the institution of Foreign Missions in the new world." It has been read in other lands, and will be read in other ages; and so long as *the servants of God shall take pleasure in the stones of Zion, and favor the dust thereof*, that "stack of hay" will be remembered.

But there are other consecrated retreats, where other missionaries and other devoted servants of the church have held communion with God. I doubt not that the light of eternity will disclose many a luminous spot in this dark world now known only to Him "who seeth in secret," but concerning which it shall then be said and remembered for ever, "that this man was born there;" and that, *there*, was begun an enterprise of piety which has turned many to righteousness, and added new glory to the empire of Christ.

It was the happiness of the writer of this article, while a member of Dartmouth College, to be a companion and fellow student with several devoted men who have since become Missionaries to foreign lands. Among these was my friend L*** S*****, a young man of distinguished powers of mind, and an enthusiastic student; but not a Christian. His ambition, indeed, for literary distinction, absorbed all his affections, and the love of God had no place in his heart, till, in the progress of a revival of religion in that College, in 18' he became a new creature. I well recollect the me never can forget it—when, having been oppress- load of his guilt for many days, his counte- nance, and his flesh wasted by the agony of his

SPIRITUAL RELIGION.

THERE are three kinds of religion among those who call themselves Christians. Of one kind it were well if the world were destitute. Excepting by the observance of religious rites and solemnities, it does not distinguish the lives of those who practise it from the lives of irreligious men. It is the form of godliness without its power: the religion which would serve at the same time two masters; would join light and darkness, Christ and Belial, believers and infidels together.

There is another kind of religion which has been called the middle path of Christianity. It is the religion manifestly of the generality of those who are considered Christians. It embraces, besides a profession and the observance of ordinances, a belief of the doctrines and an irreprehensible outward conformity to the duties of the Gospel. But it falls short of the privileges of the Gospel; not including those lively hopes and anticipations, those holy joys and sorrows, that sensible intercourse and fellowship with God and Christ, that enrapturing communion with the Holy Spirit, that vivid and permanent earnest and assurance of heaven, which the Gospel warrants and encourages in every believer.

A third kind of religion is that which does include these peculiar experiences. We would designate it *Spiritual Religion*. It is a religion which can be satisfied with nothing merely external, however blameless and fair. The offering up of prayer and praise, meditation on the Scriptures, attendance upon ordinances, liberality toward the poor, the utmost exactness and irreproachableness of life—these do not meet its demands unless there is correspondent sensibility and life in the heart. There must be a feeling of the Divine presence—a relishing of the Divine excellence—a heart-assured persuasion of the Divine favor and complacency. God must be enjoyed; or there will be disquietude of soul, as in the patriarch—“O that I knew where I might find him,” and in the Psalmist, “as the hart panteth after the water-brooks so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” If the light of God’s countenance ceases at any time to shine

upon the soul, the darkness which then covers it no outward prosperity can dispel; its sorrows nothing can alleviate. No loveliness, no excellence remains, when the heart cannot taste the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. No satisfaction is taken in the intercourse of the dearest friends when returns of grace from the Holy Comforter are suspended. The visible world is a waste wilderness when the world unseen is clouded or remote. There is no peace, no pleasure in life, when there is no sensible relish and delight in God and divine things.

The difference between this last kind of religion, and those alluded to above, is very apparent in examples of each. Who does not see a remarkable difference in piety between such men as Leighton, Baxter, Edwards, Brainerd, and Martyn, and the mass of those who bear, and are not supposed to dishonor, the Christian name? Dr. John Mason Good, the distinguished and excellent author of the "Book of Nature," said, on his death-bed, "I have taken what unfortunately the generality of Christians too much take—I have taken the middle walk of Christianity. I have endeavored to live up to its duties and doctrines, but I have lived below its privileges." The men first mentioned were not content to pursue what is here called the middle walk of Christianity. Their religion was *strictly and eminently* EXPERIMENTAL AND SPIRITUAL.

It is the design of these pages to commend and enforce this kind of religion above every other.

I. It is *Scriptural* religion. The religion of the Scriptures is the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" embracing frames and dispositions of soul more agreeable to that lively, affectionate, spiritual religion of which we speak, than to any other. Manifestly likewise is this sort of religion most congenial with that view of holy living, given us in the Scriptures: walking with God; having fellowship with the Father and the Son; communing with the Spirit; walking after the Spirit; walking in the Spirit; walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost. It is most accordant also with those passages which call upon the saints to delight themselves in God; to rejoice in the Lord; to rejoice in him always; and which represent them as having peace with God, and

the love of God shed abroad in their hearts, as having the witness of the Spirit with their own spirit ; as walking by faith, not by sight, looking more at the things of the unseen world than at things which address themselves to their bodily senses. It is, moreover, most like the religion of Scripture characters ; as of Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, who walked with God ; of Moses, and Samuel, and David and Elijah, and Daniel ; of the Apostles and the first Christians also, as far as their history has been written in the Bible. The religion of these men, who are held up to us as patterns and exemplars, was eminently a vital, affectionate, spiritual religion. They conversed closely and delightfully with God, and lived habitually under the light of his countenance, and in the sensible enjoyment of his love. But especially was the personal religion of Christ of this kind ; all whose plans and principles, ways and movements, discourses and doctrines, made it manifest, that his heart, and spirit, and will, were constantly one with the heart and spirit and will of God.

2. **Spiritual religion** is the most *rational* kind of religion. If the things of religion are not merely imaginary, they ought in fitness and reason to command the whole heart, and rule the whole inner and outer man. If they are real, they are comparatively the only realities ; all else is shadow and illusion. If the God of the Scriptures, and the objects revealed to us in eternity do indeed exist, well may the prophet pronounce the world and its affairs to be less than nothing in the comparison. Such objects then, so transcendently important in themselves, ought to have a correspondent influence on our character and conduct. And what is such an influence ? If that Being who is the infinite fountain of all being, who made me, and sustains me every moment ; who, in all the glory of his infinite perfections, “ compasses my path and my lying down,” and is ever with me ; the Being on whom my happiness wholly depends, and from whom my last sentence is to proceed—if he has that influence on me which his character and relations to me ought to exert, shall I not always be in his fear ; shall I not always dwell in love to him ; and rejoice when he smiles upon me, and be troubled when he suspends the communications of his favor ? Toward such a Being, so related to me as God is, do I not express a *reasonable* affection when I exclaim “ whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth

that I desire beside Thee." If I have any love at all for such a personage, and one so related to me as Christ, ought I not to be constrained by that love, as Paul was, to live and die to this infinite benefactor—making it my whole duty and happiness to serve and enjoy him? And what would be the result upon my heart and life, of a reasonable operation of the Gospel upon them? What manner of person should I be in all holy conversation and godliness, if my example were a just transcript of the great truths of the Gospel? That religion has been thought by some to be the most enlightened and reasonable which has least to do with the affections of the heart; but never was there a more manifest mistake. Reasonableness in religion is absorption of mind and heart—the whole man ruled and overborne by the transcendent importance and glory of the objects of religion. For a man to pretend to be religious, and yet be cold and backward in the concerns of religion, and contentedly uncertain whether the infinite objects which it discloses may not be adverse to his eternal happiness—this is not reason, but the supreme of inconsistency and stupidity.

3. It is spiritual religion alone in which the human mind can find *sensible and satisfying enjoyment*. True religious enjoyment consists in a heartfelt complacency in God and divine things. There is indeed a feeling of quietude arising from the regular discharge of moral duties, and the routine of religious observances, which is not spiritual joy or peace; but the fruit of predominant self-righteousness and fatal delusion. It implies a great abiding spiritual apathy and thoughtlessness; for if sensibility were awake, and thought intelligently exercised on the person's habitual course of life, a general worklikeness of spirit would be seen to pollute and vitiate the services of religion; and then these services, instead of yielding hope and comfort, would conspire with other things to work fear, and doubt, and misery, in the heart. There is, however, a hope of heaven different from that of the self-righteous, which springs from reflection on the general tenor of our conduct, regarded as an evidence of our spiritual character and state. This probably is the hope of the mass of professed Christians. We speak not against it, except by lamenting that it should be made so generally the measure of spiritual enjoyment. What is the amount of positive happiness that a hope of this kind yields?

It is not the *assurance* of hope—the living, refreshing, soul elevating hope of the first Christians. It does not preclude doubt, but only despair. It leaves its subjects uncertain of their state. They are not *sure* of their calling and election. The Spirit does not so “witness with their spirits” but that they remain halting, hesitating, trembling, in respect to their final sentence; or if not trembling, wondering that they do not, amidst their want of satisfying evidence. Such is the general feeling of professed Christians, in respect to their character and prospects for eternity—and such, or worse than this, must necessarily be the feeling of all who do not cultivate and exercise a spiritual religion. Nothing but a sensible, living, joyous intercourse with God and Christ and the things of the Spirit, can wholly displace anxiety or even torment from the heart. Without this there may be self-complacency, there may be delusion, there may be negative hope mingled with fear; but a soul-satisfying evidence of present acceptableness in the sight of God, and of ultimate admission into the joys of his kingdom, there cannot be, without the pleasurable consciousness of the reality and excellency of heavenly things. This consciousness is a witness that cannot be resisted; it is itself the earnest and foretaste of eternal life, and can no more co-exist with doubt, than the consciousness of an outward world can co-exist with hesitation as to the reality of such a world. Let a man *feel* habitual love to God—let him feel the peace of God in his heart—let him feel the Spirit of Christ living in him—let him feel pleased and delighted with the truths and promises of the Gospel, and he will then enjoy evidences of his state, which will displace every doubt, and yield him “glory begun below.” If therefore our readers would have a religion full of comforts and pleasures, a religion which will yield them solid satisfaction, let them fix their minds, not on that customary religion which rests in periodical services and outward strictness, but on a religion of intimate, sensible, living communion and intercourse with God.

4. This is the only kind of religion which *perceptibly advances the soul in the life and likeness of God*. They who sensibly commune with God, and keep their hearts alive to the excellency of divine things, from day to day, cannot but become more and more assimilated to those glorious objects. These objects operating upon susceptible and affec-

tionate minds, must make upon them their own impression and image; and that image must at length become too resplendent in the spirit and life, to leave it doubtful whether there has been progress and growth in grace. Men of spiritual religion, therefore, must be advancing, as time passes, toward the measure of the stature of a perfect Christian. In their views, feelings, and conversation, they must be rising nearer and nearer to "the just made perfect." The beauty of holiness must be gradually brightening upon them, and their affinity and relationship to heaven must be becoming increasingly manifest. It must be so, by the very laws of such intercourse as they maintain with heavenly objects; and that it is so in fact, no one can be ignorant. These men, of whatever country or age, do advance in moral worth and loveliness, as they advance in years. Time invigorates them in all the principles, and beautifies them in all the graces of holiness. Even while "their outward man perishes"—while the animal vivacity and vigor of their earlier years decay, "they are renewed in the inward man, day by day." Was it not thus with all the spiritually-minded, whose names we have mentioned, or of whom we have ever read or heard? But the same cannot be truly said of men of other kinds of religion. They are, in regard to religion and holiness, little better at one time than at another. Take them when you will, in the middle of life, or in old age, they are not, as far as man can see, much improved in spirit. Their hearts do not seem to be much more in heaven; their affections do not appear to be more spiritual; their devotedness to God and his interests does not seem increased. Call to mind instances of the customary sort of religion—think of those whose religion is of this kind, and consider whether these remarks are not exemplified in their conduct. Do they present themselves to our thoughts as Christians advancing in the life of God? Are they evidently holier men now than some years ago? Do we feel more confident of their final salvation at this moment than we did when they first professed conversion? Is it more certain now—more certain to themselves or to any others—that they will be saved, than it was then? Alas, it is well if the probability of their final salvation is not diminished. Professed Christians who have not a spiritual and affectionate religion, often degenerate, but seldom improve. It is not

merely praying, or reading, or hearing that profits the soul, but *just feeling* toward the objects with which the soul converses, or should converse, in prayer, reading, and hearing. These exercises are nothing, except as *sensibility of heart* pervades and animates them. It is by this sensibility, that God and our own spirits come into union and fellowship. It is by this, that our souls mingle with the invisible things of the sanctifying Spirit. Two lifeless masses are not more inoperative on each other, than the unseen world on the human character, if sensibility toward that world is wanting. We may speak, and read, and think, but we shall never be made better, if we do not *feel*.

Now when we remember what the Scriptures teach concerning the essential progressiveness of true **grace** in the heart, that it is as the little "leaven which leaveneth the whole lump;" and join with this the fact, that professed Christians who are not spiritual in their feelings, do not visibly advance in the divine life, can we rest satisfied with a religion like theirs? Is it by any means certain that their religion will save the soul?

5. Spiritual religion is far more *useful* than any other. Usefulness depends on three things, power, readiness to use it, and using it in a proper manner; and no kind of religion includes these things in so eminent a degree as the spiritual religion of which we now speak. There is more *power* in this than in any other sort of religion. Knowledge is power in religious concerns as well as every other; and there is no religion so favorable as this to the acquisition of divine knowledge. Men may be led to pursue such knowledge by curiosity, ambition, and other motives; but the attainments so made will be superficial, when compared with the illumination shed down from the Holy Spirit into the mind and heart of the spiritually discerning and inquiring Christian. How sure and substantial, how deep and enduring, is the knowledge of the spiritually-minded, in comparison with theirs who know every thing in speculation only! And ordinarily their knowledge is greater, as well as of a better kind. They meditate more on the Scriptures, they reflect more, they pray more, and the relish for divine things which inclines them to do so, makes them quick of spiritual understanding, and thus becomes the means of a more rapid growth in divine knowledge than would otherwise be possi-

ble. And as the religion of which we treat joins to greater knowledge, greater grace and holiness, which likewise is the highest kind of power, it must, in respect to its intrinsic strength and efficiency, be incomparably superior to every other.

But not only have the men of this religion more strength, they are also more *disposed to use their strength* than others. It is a false notion of spiritual-mindedness, that it inclines men to a secluded and inactively contemplative life. It had not this tendency in Christ and his apostles, or the prophets; the influence of whose untiring labors is felt over the world to this day. Spiritual-mindedness is nothing but a living and efficient benevolence, duly awake and active. From the secret place of the Most High, in which it dwells, it looks abroad upon the sensual world with a self-sacrificing, self-devoting compassion, like that of our blessed Savior; and is ever ready to go forth, in his spirit and strength, to every work of faith and love. Customary religion, and even principles of natural goodness, have led men to practise some forms of benevolence; but it is spiritual-mindedness that has cared for the bodies and souls of men on the largest scale, and has wrought miracles of mercy and love, the record of which will endure longer than the sun and the moon.

But the religion here recommended is pre-eminent, as we have already said, not only in power and in aptitude to use that power, but in the *excellence of the manner* in which it uses it. It is both in labors more abundant, and in wisdom and propriety of action more perfect. It does its work aptly, skilfully, prudently, with a spirit congenial to its ends; a spirit of meekness and love, and dependence on God. In the highest instances and sorts of benevolent labor, men of little spirituality would not find themselves in their proper element. The unsuitableness of their spirit and manner would make their work irksome, and mischief might be the result. How much out of place do such men find themselves under remarkable effusions of the Holy Spirit; when the accessions to the happiness of the universe are as the 'clouds, and as when doves fly to their windows.' It is spirituality alone that can make men as "polished shafts" to the consciences of their fellow-men at such seasons. It is only this, indeed, which can ensure a right and successful way of fulfilling any of the offices of the holiest and noblest

order of well-doing. These things demonstrate the superior usefulness of the spiritual kind of religion. Observation also confirms this conclusion. One spiritual Christian in a church is often more useful than a hundred ordinary professors. How many hundred Christians of the common kind would be required to make, in point of usefulness, one Baxter or Edwards, or Martyn! These, it is true, were men of powerful minds, but it was their superior spirituality that made their power the means of exalting the ages in which they lived. There were other professed Christians of minds as powerful and of learning as great as theirs, who did very little toward advancing the cause of holiness in the world. If our readers then would pass their days in the most useful manner—if they would give the church and their generation the greatest reason to bless God for their existence, let their religion be of the spiritual kind.

6. This kind of religion will *best sustain us under evil*. He who is accustomed to converse affectionately and delightfully with God—to lay open his heart to the influence of His “excellent glory” and of eternal objects, will acquire a capacity of enduring evil, altogether peculiar to himself. His frame of spirit, and the blessedness of that intercourse, make him in a manner invulnerable to evil. The day of evil to the man of the world is insupportable; because, besides his unholy spirit, he has no counterbalancing good in prospect. Past prosperity cannot be recalled; the future is unknown, and may be worse than the present. The unspiritual, unexercised professor of religion, too, may not be prepared for that day: the hope which now supports him may fail him then. He will then need other evidences of the divine favor than those on which he is accustomed to rely; evidences which may not be afforded him then, as they are not sought for now. But the spiritual Christian is not thus forlorn in heart when his time of trial comes. The feeling toward God expressed by the Psalmist, “whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee,” having been habitual with him even in the days of prosperity, he will not be desponding and heart-smitten now; for God, his chosen portion, remains the same, and his delight in God is the same also: and how small a loss can befall that person, how little can he be injured by any calamity in the whole creation, whose happiness was not

in the creation, but in its infinite Author. Besides, if there is a man to whom the Father of compassion will show himself *especially* gracious in the hour of need, that man, doubtless, is the spiritually-minded Christian. Who is an heir of the promises, if he is not? Whom, if not him, does God love and delight in? There may be room for doubt whether other sorts of professed Christians—all other sorts—may not be deceivers or deceived; but who doubts *his* piety who lives a spiritual and heavenly life? Such persons, then, are assuredly the children of God, whom God will not forsake in times of trouble. The night of their affliction shall be as the brightest and best of their prosperous days. They shall glorify God in “passing through the fire;” their end shall be peace, and they shall depart, leaving mankind impressed with the certainty, that whoever may find their hope of ultimate happiness disappointed, these men were more fit for heaven than for earth, and “have passed through the gates into the city” of God.

These are some of the considerations which show what manner of persons we all should be who call ourselves by the name of Christ. But there is one *objection* which we fear will weigh more with some persons than all these considerations, however solemn and conclusive: it is this, that the religion we recommend *is not a practicable one*. It may do perhaps for a very few peculiarly favored and peculiarly situated persons, but it will not answer for the generality of mankind—it is too refined, too elevated, too difficult a religion for the mass of the people. It is not, we suppose, the import of this objection, that this is a different religion from that which the Scriptures teach. The scriptural certificate to this religion we have already presented. If there is a religion on earth that corresponds to the very religion of the Bible, it is unquestionably this. Other religions may not be scriptural, but no one can doubt whether this religion is either scriptural or true. The evidences of its genuineness are like the sun’s meridian beams. The conscience of the world decides that it is genuine—the religion of the Bible—the religion of God—the religion which God has revealed to man as the sure way to heaven. But has God bound his creatures to an impracticable kind of religion? Or has he prescribed a religion for all the world, which cannot be practised by more than one man in a million?

It is obvious that if the objection means that the religion which, beyond all others, has the best claim to be received as the religion of the Scriptures, is strictly, and in plain truth, an impracticable religion to the bulk of mankind, the objection is profane and reproachful to the divine goodness and wisdom, and can hardly find a welcome lodgment in any other than an unholy breast. No! The fact that this religion is practicable by one man, proves it to be practicable by any and every other man. If any one man has ever exemplified this religion, the matter is at rest: *man* may exemplify it: it is a religion for man, and a religion which *every* man is bound to exemplify. It should be considered by those who make this objection, that they are limiting, not merely the physical capability of man, but the resources of the Holy One Himself. The question as to practicability—the true question is, not whether I, in my own strength, shall succeed in practising this religion, but whether the Spirit and grace of God can enable me to practise it. We are not required to do any thing in reliance on our own strength, which truly would fail us, even for the exercise of a good thought. On the contrary, we are warned against self-confidence, as the certain way to be ruined, and are directed to Him for strength in whom it hath pleased the Father that “all fulness should dwell;” and certain it is that destruction awaits us, if we do not go to Him, and put our exclusive trust in the provision made for us in Him. The question is this, is there not a sufficiency for us in all the fulness of the Godhead? Can we not do all things included in this religion “through Christ strengthening us?” Is there a man on earth whom Christ cannot strengthen to live the life of a spiritual Christian? Let this be demonstrated—let the arm of the Almighty be shortened—and then may it be affirmed that the religion we contend for is not a practicable religion. The truth is, that the generality of professed Christians never strive for, never aim at, this kind of religion. It is not in their hearts deliberately to purpose and intend that this religion shall be theirs. They content themselves with what is customary; and that, for the most part, is to be as religious as expediency or personal convenience may dictate. What labors, what pains-taking do they practise, to keep themselves in the love and fear of God all the day long? What care do they exercise not to grieve the Holy Spirit? What

aspirations of soul have they for eminent holiness of heart? What forgetting do we see in them of the things which are behind; or what "reaching forth unto those which are before?" What mortifications of the flesh, what fastings and watchings unto prayer do they practise? Who then are they that pronounce spiritual Christianity to be impracticable, but those who have never put it to the test of experiment? It must be confessed, that if professed Christians will not try and intend to live spiritually, they cannot live so. Paul could not have lived so without deliberate purpose and constant effort.

Still, some will think that although spiritual religion is the best and safest kind, yet as the more common sort may suffice, they will content themselves with that. But does not this savor more of a low and calculating selfishness, than of that spirit of regeneracy which instinctively pants after entire freedom from sin, and entire conformity to the image of God? Have those persons any true holiness who desire no more than may answer to keep them out of hell? But is it certain that the common sort of religion *will* suffice? Who feels certain of it? Have the professors of that religion an assurance of their salvation? Their hearts answer No! Has the world any assurance of their salvation? All men stand in doubt—and it is indeed a doubtful matter. St. Paul thought he should be a cast away if he did not keep his body under and bring it into subjection. Do these professors of religion practice such discipline on themselves, that their souls may not be lost? Who would stand in their souls' stead? In the infinite concerns of religion, no uncertainty, no suspense of mind, ought to be tolerated, if it can possibly be prevented; and prevented it may be, by giving due diligence to that end. And what is due diligence in this case? Not more than men generally employ to secure worldly things. But shall men—shall professors of religion use more diligence to secure to themselves things that perish in the using, than to lay hold on eternal life? Are such men Christians? I tremble at the question!

Thus irresistible and overwhelming, my dear readers, are the arguments for SPIRITUAL RELIGION. I beseech you, venture upon no other. Destitute of this kind of religion, there is no man, who, for a thousand worlds, would take your place at death or judgment.